

## *Wisconsin Folks: Masters of Tradition*



Bobby Bullet is a country music singer and songwriter whose work reflects his Ojibwe heritage. Bobby was born Robert St. Germaine on the Lac du Flambeau reservation in northeastern Wisconsin in 1942 but grew up in the urban setting of Madison, returning north to visit family and the reservation community frequently. As a young adult, he learned that his birth father had died in WWII and that he was adopted, prompting a search for his identity and tribal connections. After traveling through the United States, battling alcohol abuse and seeking guidance from tribal elders, he returned north, settling in Michigan's Upper Peninsula within easy distance of Lac du Flambeau.

Bobby's songs reflect this personal history in such titles as "City Where I Died" about living during difficult times in Madison and "Hang On," which offers hope to others fighting addiction. He sums up his life experience as, "I would say I went to the school of hard knocks."

Bobby's songs also wrestle with issues important to the Lac du Flambeau community such as treaty rights ("Trail of Broken Treaties"), historic events like receiving diseased blankets ("The Train"), current concerns such as repatriation of human remains and sacred objects ("Grandmother's Grave"), and sacred places ("Strawberry Island"). His ability to transform life experiences and local concerns into meaningful lyrics and straight-ahead beats was acknowledged at the highest level in 2010 with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native American Music Association.

Bobby was motivated to be part of the Apprenticeship Program through a desire to pass on his hard-earned wisdom. "At my age, the knowledge that I gained along the way should be shared so that it doesn't get lost." Bobby taught Bill Chosa the ins and outs of songwriting. He focused on song structures, the importance of a strong title, sticking to the subject of the song, and saying more with fewer words.

Thanks to Bobby's tutelage, his apprentice wrote, "Jody Is a Fighter," a song about how his daughter survived leukemia thanks to the community raising money to help with medical costs. Bobby and Bill performed the song at Elks Point, an elder housing complex in Lac du Flambeau, where it was warmly received. The song had both personal and cultural significance for Bill, who explained, "In the Native community, we try to help each other. I'm singing this song to give back thanks to the people for helping save Jody's life."